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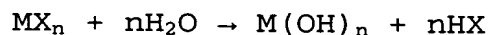
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High homogeneity Silica glass prepared
through a sol-gel procedure

5 The present invention relates to a highly homogeneous Si₂O
glass prepared through a sol-gel procedure.

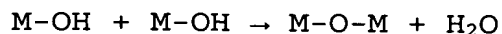
The sol-gel term defines a wide variety of processes which,
even if being different as far as the working details or
the reagents are concerned, are characterized by the
following common operations:

- 10 - preparation of a solution, or a suspension, of a
precursor formed by a compound of the element (M) the
oxide of which has to constitute the final glassy
article;
- 15 - hydrolysis, acid or base catalyzed, of the precursor,
inside the solution or suspension, to form M-OH groups
according to the reaction



wherein X generally is an alcohol residue and n means
the element M valence; the alcoxides M(OR)_n can be
20 replaced by soluble salts of the element M such as
chlorides or nitrates, and, in some cases, oxides. The
obtained mixture, i.e. a solution or a colloidal
suspension, is named sol;

- 25 - polycondensation of the M-OH groups according to the
reaction



which requires a time from few seconds to some days,
depending on the solution composition and the
temperature; during this step, a matrix is formed

called, case by case, alcoholgel, hydrogel or more generally, gel;

- gel drying till the formation of a porous monolithic body; during this step, the solvent is removed through a simple controlled evaporation, which determines the so called xerogel, or through an extraction in autoclave which determines the so called aerogel; the obtained body is a porous glass, which may have an apparent density of 10% to about 50% of the theoric density of the oxide having the same composition; the dried gel can be industrially used as such;
 - densification of the dried gel by a treatment at a temperature, generally ranging between 800°C and 1500°C, depending on the gel chemical composition and the preceding step process parameters; during this step the porous gel is becoming dense, under a controlled atmosphere, till to obtain a glassy or ceramic compact oxide having the theoric density, with a linear shrinkage equal to about 50%.
- 20 The final densification let a glassy product be obtained having good general characteristics, and, however, without any such optical homogeneity property to let the material be crossed by the transmitted light wave front without any suffered distortion.
- 25 The Applicant has found that in the case suitable treatments under controlled atmosphere are carried out during the densification stage, the final glassy product is obtained having no streak and strip, the same being consequently characterized by an almost total homogeneity.

Therefore, the object of the present invention is a silica glass characterized, inter alia, by the following specific properties:

- 5 - light internal transmittance in the wave length between 185nm and 193nm higher than 85%
- light internal transmittance in the wave length between 193nm and 2600nm higher than 99.5%
- light internal transmittance in the wave length between 2600nm and 2730nm higher than 99%
- 10 - light internal transmittance in the wave length between 2730nm and 3200nm higher than 85%
- no streak, material of class 4 or better according to the rule DIN ISO 10110-4
- no strip
- 15 - no signal in the shadography (no shadow or intensity change)

such a silica glass being prepared according to a sol-gel process wherein, in the meanwhile the densification is achieved, a treatment is carried out by means of an
20 atmosphere containing water traces.